DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 095 188 SP 008 370

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TITLE A Pilot Program for the Child Development Associate Degree.
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 5p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Programs; High School Graduates; Models; *Pilot Projects; *Preschool Education; Teacher Aides; Teachers; *Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Child Development Associate Degree; La Fayette Parish; Louisiana

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Child Development Associate (CDA) pilot program designed to establish an effective and economical system of training and credentialling for individuals working with preschool children. Candidates must be high school graduates, must have less than 40 college credit hours, and must be employed as an aide or a teacher in the Headstart program or be interested in working in an early childhood education center. Participants were observed during the first two weeks of the program and assessed in terms of the use of the physical facilities, utilization of space, materials available, use of materials, and the general effectiveness of the CDA candidate. This data also indicated the level and intensity of instruction as related to each of the specific competencies. Classes were held once a week to discuss the competencies, and structured and unstructured observations were also made during the week. A checklist was developed and used to determine the overall effectiveness of the program and the level at which each participant demonstrated competency. The results will be analyzed by two indepedent judges. (PD)

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ED 095188

A Pilot Program for the Child Development Associate Degree

by

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As the personnel needs for early childhood education continue to grow, demands are being made on those individuals engaged in such programs to practice sound and quality procedures. The demand for competent early childhood personnel can be met by and through an effective CDA training program. It was these demands and the mandate for quality child care services that provided the impetus for the development of this pilot CDA project model.

The primary purpose of the Child Development Associate model is to establish an effective and economical system of training and credentialling for individuals now working with preschool children and for those planning to enter the field. The main focus of this pilot CDA program is to maximize competence for each CDA candidate working with young children (Klein, 1973).

This particular pilot program is designed for maximizing competence and credentialling candidates for the Child Development Associate Degree. The pilot study will serve as a formative evaluation (Scriven, 1967) design that will provide the participants with an opportunity to translate acquired content knowledge for improved educational performance and practice in an Early Childhood school program.

The evaluation will take place on the site where each participant is teaching and at the level of the selected competencies. The results will be used to support changes indicated in each competency. This formative evaluation system will also provide feedback data and an opportunity for revision and to develop a corrective system between and within

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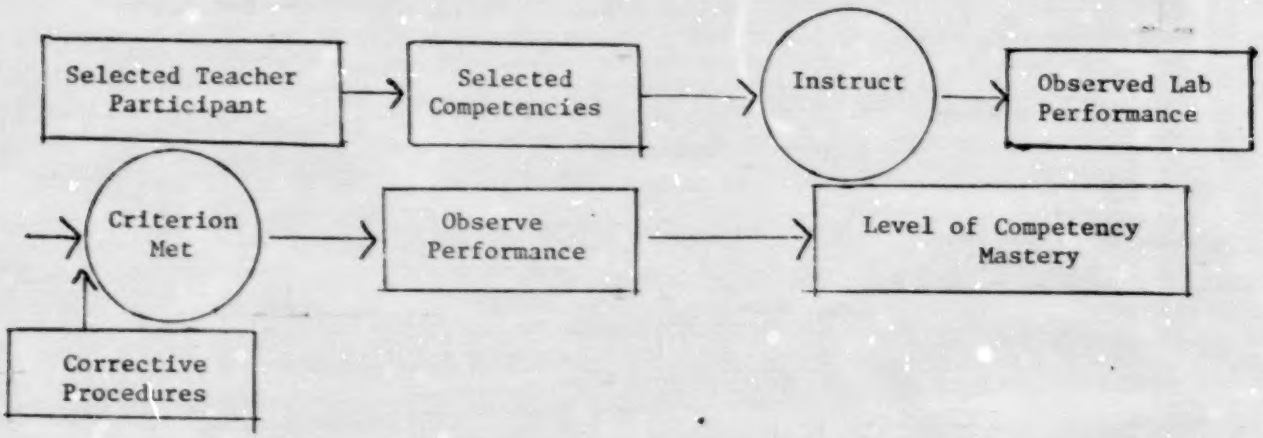
competencies. The implication of development according to this model is that cycles will be made within each stage until criteria are satisfied. In other words, this prototype might be a semester training program for some teachers, or two years depending on the rate of performance for each participant. One of the major characteristics of this prototype is its ability to replicate.

CDA Teacher Competency Development Model



The teacher participant was selected for this developmental pilot program for the Child Development Associate Degree with and through the cooperation, advice, and help of the parish (county) Headstart Coordinator of the Lafayette Parish School System. Each CDA candidate was selected on the basis of the following criteria: (1) must be a high school graduate, (2) have less than forty (40) college credit hours, employed as an aide or a teacher in the Headstart Program or interested in working in an early childhood education center. After each CDA candidate was chosen, based on the stated criteria, they were randomly selected and then randomly assigned to a specific site designated as part of the pilot study.

There were twenty (20) CDA candidates selected to participate in this pilot study which began in September of 1973.

The selected competencies to be developed are those designed by a task force of educators and child-development specialists. These competencies, that are to be acquired by the CDA candidate, are divided into six general categories (Klein, 1973) and are as follows:

1. Setting up and maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment.
2. Advancing physical and intellectual competence.
3. Building a positive self-concept and individual strength.
4. Organizing and sustaining the positive functioning of children and adults in a group in a learning environment.
5. Bringing about optimal coordination of home and center child-rearing practices and expectations.
6. Carrying out supplementary responsibilities related to the children's programs.

Procedure:

In the first two weeks of the pilot project, the site coordinator visited each participant at their place of employment for a general diagnostic assessment of the CDA candidate's general strengths and weaknesses. This structural observational assessment was made in terms of the use of the physical facilities, utilization of space, materials available, use of materials, and the general effectiveness of the CDA candidate. The data obtained from these observational assessments were to be used as a point of instructional departure. The data also indicated the level and intensity of instruction as related to each of the specific selected competencies that are to be developed during the pilot study.

Each of the competencies selected was used as a major instructional thrust. This instructional procedure took place at the college campus for

one hour each week or in one of the classrooms of a chosen participant. Such a system permitted the college instructor to help each participant clearly identify and comprehend the subsumed items under each selected competency. Also, it provided a forum for discussion, selection of performance strategies, material to be used, develop insights, and feedback for clarification. Then the indicated revisions were designed.

Then observations, both structured and unstructured, were made on the site where each participant taught. These observations were for two hours per week and were recorded in terms of actual performance as practiced in the school center by the CDA candidate. The recorded results were used as a general formative assessment which indicated the degree each criterion was met, and if instructional corrective procedures were indicated.

Then the performance of each CDA candidate was observed again to determine the effectiveness of the re-educative and corrective systems. This in turn revealed the level at which each participant had achieved mastery of each competency. The level criterion of acceptable performance required that 70 per cent of the CDA candidates master 70 per cent of the selected CDA competencies.

A checklist was developed and was used to determine the overall effectiveness of the program and the level at which each participant demonstrated competence, by his teaching performance, of the acquisition of each selected competency in the Child Development Associate program. Two weeks after the program was actuated the level of competencies of each selected CDA participant was assessed by the coordinator. Assessment was on a reoccuring schedule designed for appropriate exit of the program.

The results of the data will be analyzed by two independent judges to determine the program effectiveness and level of competency acquisition for each CDA candidate as he assumes primary responsibility for the development, teaching, and learning of a group of young children. This data will be used as feedback information to indicate revisions of the pilot model program. The data is gathered and assessed on a reoccuring schedule of every four (4) weeks which is designed to provide appropriate exit of the program by those CDA candidates, who have by their performance, achieved competence at the specified level of mastery.

The revised pilot model program will serve as the prototype for preparing and credentialling individuals interested in working in early childhood education. This model should also shift the criterion for competence and certification away from completion of a prescribed number of college hours and course work to the actual performance competencies at the center where each CDA candidate has demonstrated, under actual classroom conditions, the behavior assessed to be the essential job-related competencies. Then credentialling should be granted to the CDA candidate.

In summary, the CDA Teacher Competency Model is designed to provide an efficient and economical approach for training and credentialling individuals working with or who anticipate working with young children. Further, if the pilot study of the CDA model should prove successful, it could provide the needed professionals to insure quality child care and adequate early education for young children in day care and pre-school centers across the nation.

Selected References

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